Student X

May 31, 2010

Mr. Brocato- English 117

The Shakes

**I am working on emotion**

It shakes. Oh God, it shakes. I stare at my grandfather’s hand as it twitches in front of me, its movements as erratic as the heartbeat fluttering inside my chest at a tempo somewhere between nervous awkwardness and full out panic. Nausea rolls over me as I feel my stomach churn and drop, twisting around and around until everything is backwards and nothing is right. Nothing is the way it is supposed to be because it is so blatantly obvious to me that this is not how things are meant to be. My grandfather is not supposed to have Parkinson’s. My grandfather is supposed to be steady, dependable, always in control. My grandfather is *not* supposed to have Parkinson’s.

People in withdrawal get the shakes. People coming off alcohol or drugs or some other addiction, they get the shakes. My grandfather is not an addict, his tremors won’t be stilled by a stiff drink or the next great high, I don’t see how that’s fair. I don’t see the justice in the fact that there’s no cure for him. I can’t understand how a man whose hands used to be so steady can so suddenly be reduced to these uncontrollable jolts and twitches. He taught me how to greet people, made me look up from under the veil of bangs I liked to hide behind and look them in the eye. He taught a child with a fear of people to look up and shake their hands, it was his solidness, his dependability, his hands that taught mine to hold firm, to grasp tight and show no fear. My grandfather’s steady hands cradled his infant children, guided his daughters through childhood, and held them steady through the turbulence of adolescence. It was his sturdy hands that held Nana as she drifted away, and his stability that anchored a mourning family. My grandfather is not an addict or an alcoholic. He never made those poor decisions, he was never that irresponsible. There is no justice in the fact that a disease can, in the course of single instant, take so much away from him.

I know that on the inside he’s still steady, the disease doesn’t change that. Much like the way his thick glasses never stopped him from seeing right through me, I know his unsteady hand is not enough to stop his solid support. I know I’m not really angry about it. I know I’m not naïve enough to think the world is fair, but what I don’t want to accept is that I’m terrified. I’m frightened of how people will stare at him, pity him because he’s damaged, and I’m scared because he’s a proud man, and it kills me that he’ll be ashamed. I’m terrified because of the icy hand that grips my heart and forces the ragged breath from my lungs, the salty torrents that burn behind my eyes because I know he’ll never hold his infant grandchild in his arms. Maybe most of all I’m scared because it could happen to me and maybe most of all I despise myself, because what I hate the most is that my fear for my own life and my own future is even stronger than my empathy for him. I’m petrified because every time I see him my fluffy teenage illusions of invincibility don’t stand a chance against reality. I’m in agony because of the guilt I feel when I instinctually cringe from my own grandfather, and the shame of how I’ve turned him into a reminder of imminent death.

I stare at his hand in front of me as it flutters and flips. I feel the icy vise of panic close around my throat as my resolve to be strong flickers, dying like candle flame caught in the clutches of a howling gale. I look up, just like he taught me so many years ago. I look him in the eye, and what I see there gives me courage. Just like he always told me I reach out and grasp his hand in my own, staring back at him, firm and unafraid, showing no fear. I can see in his eyes that he’s still the same. He’s still my grandfather, just as he always has been, so when the time comes that he can’t hold steady any longer, I promise that I will be there, and this time, I promise, that *I’ll* be steady for *him*.